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Elmwood Folks

A Drama in 'Three Acts

By
CHARLES S. BIRD



BOSTON
WALTER H. BAKER & CO.

1910

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Elmwood Folks

CHARACTERS

DAVID BAINBRIDGE, *editor of the Elmwood "Item."*
JAMES WENTWORTH, *an old compositor.*
SQUIRE ALFORD, *a hard man.*
DICK ALFORD, *his stepson, a young lawyer.*
WHITTIER JONES, *a contributor to the "Item."*
TOMMY GAY, *David's apprentice.*
MR. PINCH, *an officer.*
A MESSENGER BOY.
MRS. BAINBRIDGE, *David's wife.*
BESSIE BAINBRIDGE, *their daughter.*
DRUCILLA JONES, *Whittier's aunt.*
MARY GAY, *Mrs. Bainbridge's maid. Tommy's sister.*

SYNOPSIS

ACT I.—Office of the Elmwood *Item*.
ACT II.—Lawn beside the Bainbridge home.
ACT III.—Parlor in the same.

Three months are supposed to have elapsed between second and third acts.



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COSTUMES

DAVID.—Age fifty. Plain suit for Act I; in shirt sleeves, with coat and hat to put on when going out. Modern suit for Act II. House coat and slippers for Act III.

WENTWORTH.—Age sixty. Working clothes, apron and shirt sleeves, for Act I. Plain suit for Act II. Same for Act III, with coat on arm and hat.

ALFORD.—Well dressed. Old style collar and tie; heavy watch-chain and seal; large soft hat; cane; same for all three acts. A man of sixty, but well preserved.

DICK.—Modern dress; straw hat for Acts I and II; derby for Act III.

WHITTIER.—Loose sack coat; white vest; trousers and coat black; soft hat; Byron collar; flowing tie; rather long hair, for first two acts; modern suit for Act III, with hair cut. Care should be observed that wig matches natural hair.

TOMMY.—Ordinary boy's suit; shirt; pants and apron for Act I. Apron daubed with printer's ink; no vest; cap for running out. Acts II and III, summer suit.

MRS. BAINBRIDGE.—Morning dress for Act I. Modern dress for other two acts.

BESSIE.—Summer dresses for first two acts; hat for going out. Traveling suit for Act III.

DRUCILLA.—Old maid make-up.

MARY.—House dress; apron, etc.

Elmwood Folks

ACT I

SCENE.—*Office of the Elmwood "Item." Door back c. Old-fashioned desk R. Telephone on desk. Desk is littered with papers, letters, manuscripts, etc. A typesetter's form back L., with type box, etc.; high stool in front. Table L. C., piled with exchanges; a few plain chairs about room; floor littered up, waste-paper basket by desk, bills, etc., on wall. At rise DAVID BAINBRIDGE is seated at desk. JAMES WENTWORTH is setting type at form. TOMMY GAY by table leaning on broom, reading newspaper; he is supposed to be sweeping office. A morning in July.*

DAVID (*reading manuscript*). Ha! Ha! H-ah! Oh, my! Ha! Ha! Say, James —

JAMES. Well, sir?

DAVID. James, listen to this.

JAMES (*smiling quietly*). I suppose I can guess what it is before you begin.

DAVID. No doubt, no doubt; but this time it is the limit. Listen. (*Reads.*) "An Ode to a Sparrow.

"O little bird upon the tree,
That sings and whistles merri-lee,
While I sit on a stump;
I see you give your tail a fling,
And flirt your little feathered wing
As you your back do hump——"

(*Looks up.*) Huh! "stump—hump"—that's what you might call getting stumped for a rhyme, eh? (*Continues.*)

"I wish that I could sit all day.——"

(*Looks up.*) Wish? Why, he don't do anything else but sit all day. Pity he wasn't a hen; it might amount to something. (*Continues.*)

"I wish that I could sit all day
 And sing a little roundelay,
 Like you, O happy bird;
 With music sweet I'd fill the air,
 And at this coarse world's wear and tear,
 I'd never say a word.

—WHITTIER JONES."

Now isn't that *sweet*? Say, wouldn't Whit look pretty sitting up in a tree singing a—a—what is it he calls it? (*Looks at manuscript.*) Oh, a "roundelay," whatever that is.

TOM. Ha! Ha! He'd look like a turkey buzzard.

JAMES. Poor boy; why does he do it? (*Shakes his head.*)

DAVID (*angrily*). Do it? Why, he *don't*; he don't come within a mile of doing it. Bah! to think of a full-grown man writing such twaddle, and expecting me to publish it in the *Item*. Driveling rot! No more of it for me. Why, all my exchanges are beginning to poke fun at the Elmwood *Item's* "poetical rubbish heap," as they call it.

TOM. Say, Mr. Bainbridge, did you hear what happened to Whit night before last?

DAVID. Um—no, Tommy; what was it?

TOM. Why, he went out in their back yard to recite some verses to the moon that he had written about it, and backed into his Aunt Drusie's hotbed; went right through, glass and all. Ha! Ha! Ha!

DAVID. Ha! Ha! Served him right. Say, James, *that* poem must have been a "smashing one," hey?

JAMES. Poor fellow! it's a pity he cannot get that foolishness out of his head. He'd be a pretty nice kind of a boy if it were not for his—ah—"poetry," as he terms it.

DAVID. Um-m.

JAMES. Had I not better go into the pressroom and see how they are getting along with this week's edition?

DAVID. Yes, James, guess you had; and tell them to push the paper out on time this week. (*Exit JAMES, L. U. E.*) And here, Tommy, take these letters down to the post-office and bring back the mail; and mind, now, no baseball or marbles on the way.

TOM. (*soberly*). No, sir.

(*Winks aside; takes letters; discards apron; puts on his cap, and exit by door back, whistling.*)

DAVID (*looking over papers*). Now wasn't that just like old Wentworth—what he said about Whittier Jones? Catch him saying anything bad about anybody. I never saw such a chap; he can always find a straight grain in the crookedest piece of timber that ever grew. Says he has learned by bitter experience not to judge too quickly by appearances. Perhaps he is right; guess there must have been something in his life that has caused him to view things at a different angle from the most of us. Well, David, this won't do; you'd better get down to business, or there'll be nothing done to-day.

(*Squares away for work.*)

Enter MRS. BAINBRIDGE, L. U. E.

MRS. B. (*laughing and putting her hand lovingly on DAVID'S shoulder*). Well, David, talking to yourself as usual? You must enjoy your own society more than ——

DAVID (*taking her hand*). Hullo, mother, what's the trouble in the Bainbridge establishment to-day? Bread all dough—cream all butter—or what? I know it's something important when you hunt the editor of the *Elmwood Item* in his sanctum sanctorum, and so out with it. Ha! Ha! Want a new ——

MRS. B. Will you try to be quiet a moment, you old talking machine? How can I tell you *anything* if you keep up a continual stream of talk, as you always do?

DAVID. I'm dumb as a rabbit, my dear. Out with it; I know you must have something on your mind. I can always tell by looking in those eyes, which have always been the dearest ——

MRS. B. There you go again. (*Shakes her finger at him.*)

DAVID. Forgive me, my dear. (*Kisses her.*) Now, then, fire away, dear, before I get started again.

MRS. B. David, I suppose you have noticed that our Bessie and Dick Alford have always seen a good deal of each other—have been friends, in fact, since they were children; and that since Bessie returned from college they have seemed more fond of each other's society than ever, and ——

DAVID (*dryly*). Well, mother, since you mention it, I believe I have seen Dick hanging 'round here quite a bit, first and last. Ha! Ha! And I don't know as I blame him any. If I was a young chap like him, I think ——

MRS. B. Now what did I tell you?

DAVID. Sure enough; I forgot.

MRS. B. And so I was not much surprised when Bessie told me last night that she had accepted Dick, and they would be so happy if we would consent to their ——

DAVID (*jumping up*). Consent? Of course we will. Why, mother, this is the best piece of news I've heard in a month of Sundays. Bessie's happiness is above everything else with you and me, and Dick Alford is the finest young fellow in Elmwood; doing well at the law, too. It couldn't be better, but —— Ha! Ha! Ha!

MRS. B. Well, David, what is there so dreadfully amusing about it?

DAVID. I was wondering how Dick's stepfather, Squire Alford, would be pleased with the news. The old skinflint! Not that he cares,—or for the matter of that, ever did care anything for Dick; but do you know, I sometimes believe that old sore rankles yet, in spite of the years since ——

MRS. B. David, don't talk nonsense.

DAVID (*putting an arm around her*). Yes I do, dear. I don't think he has ever forgiven me for marrying the dearest girl in the world, and the one he had his own eye on. You remember he called me a "poverty-stricken ink slinger" at the time,—said he'd get even if it took a lifetime. The old screw! We can afford to laugh at him now, I hope. Look at ourselves—then look at him—all alone—nothing but his money—getting on in years, and sour as a crab-apple; why, with *all* his wealth, I wouldn't ——

(*Voices heard outside. DICK ALFORD and BESSIE BAINBRIDGE enter L. U. E.*)

MRS. B. Hush! I hear them coming.

BESS. Well, here you are. I have been hunting the house over for you, mother. It is such a lovely morning, Dicky and I are going to drive out to the ——

DICK. One moment, dear; I want to speak to your father and mother first. (*Turns to DAVID and MRS. B.*) You must both know that Bessie and I have long ——

BESS. Oh, yes, for ever so long.

DICK (*confused*). And—and we have hoped that you ——

BESS. Oh, you will, won't you, daddy?

DICK. Ah—er—would see that it would make us very happy if you would only consent to ——

DAVID (*enjoying the situation*). Consent to your going driving? Why, of course. I haven't the slightest objections,

provided mother is willing and your horse is perfectly safe; you know how to drive, don't you, Dick?

DICK. Of course; but, sir, it is not a question of driving. You see, Bessie is as anxious as I am—and ——

DAVID. Then I don't see ——

MRS. B. Now, David ——

BESS. Father! don't you understand? After poor Dicky has spoken so plainly, too? You cannot help but see ——

DICK (*floundering*). Yes; and it only needs—it—er—only ——

MRS. B. (*coming to the rescue*). What do you want to plague the poor children for, David? He knows all about it, dears. I have just told him, and if you but knew how happy this makes us both ——

DAVID (*seriously*). Children (*kissing BESS.*), this is the (*taking DICK's hand*) happiest moment of my life—(*looking slyly at MRS. B.*) except one, and that was when ——

MRS. B. (*smiling*). David, can't you be sensible?

DAVID. Ha! Ha! How dreadfully bashful some folks are; but this really *is* a happy day for us all. Come, let's go into the house a little while, and talk this over.

[*All exeunt, L. U. E.*]

Enter WHITTIER JONES, C. D., reading manuscript.

WHIT. (*reading*).

“The bee that from the clover bloom,
The sticky honey sips,
Drinks nothing half so sweet, my love,
As honey of thy lips.”

(*Looks up.*) Ah, what a *glorious* thing is the gift of poesy—who but a poet could so express such a tender sentiment?
(*Resumes.*)

“And all the little stars of night,
Which twinkle in the sky,
Glow not as bright as does, my sweet,
Thy blue and limpid eye.”

“Thy blue and limpid eye”! That last line is beautiful—beautiful; “limpid” is so expressive; I looked it up and found

it meant pellucid, and I found pellucid meant translucent, and translucent meant limpid, so I used it; it will surely make an impression on a girl with a college education. (*Looks around.*) Now, if I can only see her. Her father has no doubt called her attention particularly to the verses which I permit him to insert in the *Elmwood Item* each week. She must see that many of them possess a deeper meaning than the average village intellect can grasp, but which a truly receptive heart could not fail to comprehend; for what other reason would I scatter my most cherished thoughts among these obscure people, when a broader field is only waiting until I am ready to —

Enter TOM., C. D.; lays mail on desk.

TOM. Hullo, Whit, going to the game to-morrow?

WHIT. (*hastily concealing manuscript*). What game?

TOM. (*astonished*). What game? Why, the *ball* game, of course.

WHIT. No, Tommy, I have no time for such rude pastimes as baseball; a "literary life" lifts one above such things.

TOM. (*throwing down cap, dons apron*). Gee! it's going to be the hottest game of the season; two apiece for Elmwood and Hilltown, and to-morrow's game decides the series. I'd rather lose my job than not see it. I'm bettin' on Elmwood.

WHIT. It does not interest me, Tommy, in the least.

TOM. (*aside; disgusted*). Huh! I always thought Whit was a fool, an' now I know it. Not want to go to a ball game! and him livin' in the United States! He makes me tired. You bet I'll be there, if Mr. Bainbridge will only let me off.

(He starts to work around the office.)

WHIT. Ah, by the way, Tommy, do you know if Mr. Bainbridge received my poem for this week's issue?

TOM. What was it about? Was it that one about the "chippy"?

WHIT. No, no!—"The *sparrow*."

TOM. Uh, huh; he got it.

WHIT. Did you hear him say anything about it? How—er—he liked it, or —

TOM. (*trying not to laugh*). Sure, it tickled him stiff.

WHIT. Er—what? I don't understand.

TOM. (*soberly*). I mean that it seemed to please him very much. I heard him reading it to Mr. Wentworth. They seemed to get a lot of fun out of it.

WHIT. Fun?

TOM. I mean pleasure; it's the same thing, ain't it, Whit?

WHIT. (*dubiously*). Why, yes, I believe so; but not, I hope, in *this* case. I am gratified to know that Mr. Wentworth liked it; his opinion is worth having, and I am sure it was very flattering.

TOM. Oh, *very*. Well, I've got to go into the pressroom.

WHIT. All right, Tommy. I believe I'll sit here a while and read the morning paper. I have nothing else to do just now.

(*Takes chair by table, R.; picks up paper and reads.*)

TOM. (*aside*). You never *do* have anything else to do. I guess your Aunt Drusie would be a good deal better off if you *did*.
[*Exit, R. U. E.*]

Enter MARY GAY, L. U. E.

MARY (*going to desk*). I wonder if there are any letters for the house this morning. (*Looks at mail.*) Elmwood *Item*—Elmwood *Item*—David Bainbridge, Esq. (*Looks up.*) I wonder who *that* is from? (*Looks it over.*) Some lawyer, I guess—yes, “Jackson and Jackson, attorneys-at-law,”—Mr. Bainbridge's lawyers in the city. Any more? I guess not. Oh, yes, here's one,—“Miss Elizabeth Bainbridge, Elmwood.” Now, *who* under the sun would think of calling her anything but Bessie? It's local, too, and in a man's hand. Ha! Ha! I wonder what Mr. Dicky Alford would think of that?

WHIT. (*starting, and putting down paper*). Good-morning, Mary.

MARY. Oh! Mr. Whittier, how you startled me. (*Drops letter.*) I didn't know there was any one here.

WHIT. I was just looking over the paper while I waited to see—er—— (*Aside.*) This young woman has always appeared to appreciate my work; why not read her this last child of my brain, which I have dedicated to—ah—and so judge what effect it is likely to have on—er—Miss Gay. (*Aloud.*) May I trespass on your time a few moments?

(*Draws manuscript from his bosom.*)

MARY. Certainly, Mr. Whittier. (*Aside.*) Oh, I do believe he is going to read me one of his beautiful poems.

WHIT. (*aside*). “Mr. Whittier.” I wish all of our vil-

lagers would yield me the respect this young woman so cheerfully concedes. Miss—er—Miss Mary, you have done me the honor before this of professing to admire my writings,—my blossoms of genius, as it were; may I read you my latest and best? I think it will appeal to you, and I would be glad of your candid opinion of its merits, before I hand it to—ahem—here it is.

MARY. Why, what an honor; *do* go on, I am just *dying* to hear it, Mr. Whittier.

WHIT. (*bowing, much flattered; reading*).

“The bee that from the clover bloom,
The sticky honey sips,
Drinks nothing half so sweet, my love,
As honey of thy lips.”

MARY. Why, how beautifully you have expressed that.

WHIT. I am glad you think so,—but let me read you the next verse. I consider it even *better*.

“And all the little stars of night,
Which twinkle in the sky,
Glow not as bright as does, my sweet,
Thy blue and limpid eye.”

MARY. How exquisite.

WHIT. It is entitled, “To one who will understand.”

MARY (*aside*). He must mean it for me. (*To WHIT.*) It is *lovely*; ah, if *I* could only write poetry, I would ——

WHIT. (*loftily*). Oh, as for that, you need not repine, Miss Gay, for the divine fire of poesy descends upon but few in a generation.

MARY. I know; but how nice it must be to feel that you are one of the elect. (*Sighs.*) Now you must excuse me. I have to run down to the store.

WHIT. May I not walk along with you? I don't think I will be able to see the—ah ——

MARY. Of *course* you may. I will get my hat and be right back.

[*Exit, L. U. E.*

Enter JAMES, R. U. E.

JAMES. Ah, good-morning, Whittier; glad to see you.

WHIT. Good-morning, Mr. Wentworth.

JAMES. Well, have you thought over what I said to you the other evening in regard to looking up that position?

WHIT. Yes, sir, I have considered it; and while I appreciate your kindness in the matter, I really do not think it wise to relinquish my literary aspirations for the more humble paths of commerce.

JAMES. Better be sure, my boy, that you are not making a mistake. Many a valuable career has been spoiled through the choice of a wrong road in youth.

WHIT. Oh, I feel sure I am right; no one could have the feelings *I* have without *knowing* —

Enter MARY, L. U. E.

MARY. All ready, Mr. Whittier. How do you do, Mr. Wentworth?

JAMES. Good-morning, Mary; a pleasant walk to you both.

MARY. Thank you. [*Exeunt WHIT. and MARY, C. D.*]

JAMES. Poor boy! Living in the clouds, while right down here on solid earth there is real happiness within his grasp if he would only open his eyes to that which is so easy for all the rest of us to see. Mary is a good, industrious girl, and would make him a capable wife. I know there is better stuff in Whittier than his weak attempts at verse making would indicate, and when the right time comes I'll have another talk with him and see if his latent good sense cannot be brought to the surface.

(Goes to type case.)

Enter DAVID, L. U. E.; goes to desk.

DAVID *(looking over papers)*. Well, James, I have some news for you.

JAMES. Have you? What is it, David, some disgruntled subscriber stopped his paper, or —?

DAVID *(laughing)*. No, this is *good* news. Dick and Bessie are engaged,—going to be married in the fall.

JAMES *(coming over, grasps DAVID's hand)*. My dear David, this is good news indeed. Nothing I could have heard would have given me greater joy, for ever since I have been here, and that is nearly fifteen years, I have loved these children as though they were my own, and I feel that I have the right to claim a share in the happiness which this will bring to you and yours.

DAVID (*warmly*). To be sure you have; we have known all along how interested you were in their welfare, and we have appreciated it, though to tell the truth, we have never been wholly able to understand it, strangers as we all were to you at first.

(*Turns to desk.*)

JAMES. That would not be hard for you to understand, David, if you only realized the kindness which I, a lonely man, have been the grateful recipient of in this home. (*Aside.*) Ah, little do these good people suspect my real reason for being so deeply interested in all that concerns them.

DAVID. Well, James, at any rate we know you are one of the best old fellows that ever lived, and that is enough for us.

(*JAMES returns to stool.*)

Enter AUNT DRUCILLA JONES, C. D.

DRU. Good-mornin', David; good-mornin', Mr. Wentworth. I was jest goin' by an' thought I'd stop a minit and see about my subscription to th' *Item*. Hope I can soon pay up for last year's paper now. Whittier tells me he is expectin' to hear somethin' from that big magazine he sent some of his work to a month ago, and ——

DAVID. Humph! Did he send any postage along with it?

DRU. Oh, yes, it took a ten-cent stamp on the wrapper. He says them folks is always slow about answerin' letters, they have so many; but he says they will get around to it in a reasonable time. Probably they won't bother with writin' at all—jest send a check, you know. How much, now, do you s'pose ——?

DAVID. Um-m. I hope you will not be disappointed, Aunt Drusie. And as for the *Item*, don't let *that* worry you. I think you will get it every week as long as I am its publisher, and I guess that will be for some time yet. Hear any news this morning?

(*DRU. sits near desk.*)

DRU. Oh, nothin' particular. I come by Lyddy Spooner's jest now. Lyddy was a-hangin' out her wash in the front yard, an' she called to me as I was goin' up th' road, an' so I stopped, an' Lyddy come t' th' fence, wipin' her han's on her apron, an' says, "Did you hear about th' fire last night?" I

says, "No; where was it?" And Lyddy said that she an' Job wus woke up las' night by hearin' th' roosters a-crowin' down behind th' barn. Job said to her, "That's kinder funny for them to be crowin' *this* time o' night, when there ain't no moon, an' 'twas darker'n pitch when we come t' bed." But jest then Lyddy said she turned over in bed and seen light under th' winder curtain, an' she says, "For goodness' sake, git up, Job Spooner; it's broad daylight an' we've overslep' ourselves, an' there's my washin' t' do," an'—well, Job jumped out on the floor an' pulled up the curtain, an' then Lyddy said he yelled fire, an' made a grab for his pants. She said, "Where is it?" an' he hollered out, "It's th' barn; come on." And then he put down-stairs, an' she after him, soon as she could git inter somethin', both yellin' "fire" as hard as they could. But she said when they got out in the yard they see it wasn't th' barn at all, but 'twas their old haystack down behind it. Lyddy said 'twan't much loss, as 'twas over half used up, anyway. I asked her how they s'posed it got afire, an' she said Job thought likely some tramp had crawled in it to sleep an' set it afire with his pipe; but she said they was so glad 'twasn't th' barn that they didn't look 'round any, but went back t' bed an' went t' sleep.

DAVID. Well, I guess the loss of a ton or so of hay won't hurt Job Spooner very much. He would not have had it outside, anyway, if his barn hadn't been so full last fall he had no other place to put it.

DRU. Yes, that's what Lyddy said. Well, I guess I'd better be a-movin'. (*Starts for door; returns.*) Oh, by th' way, David, now I think of it, did Whittier let you have his last poem—that one about th' sparrer? He first thought of sendin' it t' some of th' magazines, but then he said he guessed he'd put one more piece into the Elmwood *Item* as a sort of a valadictry, whatever that is, before he stuck his poetical ploughshare into a more fertile soil. Wasn't that beautifully expressed? But he is always saying such fine things it is hard for a body to remember them all. Oh, I tell you that boy will be heard of some day, mark my words.

DAVID. Very likely, Aunt Drusie, very likely. Yes, I got the poem, and it was—er—about like the rest.

DRU. I knew you would think so. (*Starts for door.*) Well, good-mornin'.

DAVID. Good-day. (*Takes up papers again.*)

DRU. (*returning*). Now I think of it, there was one other

thing. When I was down to the post-office I heard Squire Alford talkin' to some of the men about them minin' stocks that feller was peddlin' 'round here last spring, and that everybody in Elmwood seemed to be so crazy about.

DAVID. Did you? Well, what did the Squire have to say?

DRU. As near as I could make out—without list'nin', you know —

DAVID (*dryly*). Oh, of course, of course.

DRU. As near as I could make out, he said somethin' about its bein' the biggest swindle that ever struck the town.

DAVID. Um-m. (*Opens a letter.*)

DRU. Well, good-bye.

DAVID (*absently*). Good-day, good-day.

JAMES (*coming over*). David, what do you think about this mining investment? You know I said —

DAVID (*laughing*). Think of it, James? Why, I think Alford is chewing over his sour grapes again. You know he tried to get some of those shares himself after the rest of us had seen what a good thing it was, and there was no more to be had. Squire Alford—bah!

JAMES. Well, it may be all right. I hope it is, but you know I advised you to look into it carefully. Perhaps, though, Aunt Drusie did not hear —

DAVID. Aunt Drusie—the dear old gossiping soul! Can't you see, James, that all she came in here for this morning was to talk about Whittier and his infernal rot? And she wanted a few extra pegs to hang an excuse on, that's all.

JAMES. Oh, I suppose it's all right.

DAVID (*a little uneasily*). Certainly it is. I am afraid you will find yourself in the wrong about this, for once, although that don't happen very often, I admit. (*Ring at telephone.*) Hello.....yes.....no, he was here. Just gone for a short drive with my daughter.....is that so.....poor chap.....too bad..... where? At the hotel.....yes.....right away.

JAMES. Anything wrong, David?

DAVID. It was Dr. Brown. He said there was a man—probably a tramp—badly hurt on the railroad just now, trying to board a moving train. (*Calls off.*) Tommy—Tommy! (*Enter TOM., R. U. E.*) You run down the spring road and see if you can find Dick. Tell him he's wanted at the hotel right away. There is a man down there fatally hurt, and he wants to see a lawyer at once. Run now, and if you make good

time maybe I'll see about letting you go to the ball game to-morrow.

TOM. Gee! see me start. (*Runs off, C. D.*)

JAMES. Poor fellow! hard luck.

DAVID. Yes, yes. (*Reads letter.*) Hullo, here's a check from old Fleming for the *Item* for the last few years. Hum—better late than never. I'd about given him up. (*Opens another letter.*) Here's the copy for the bill of that sheriff's sale down at the "Corners." Poor Joe Turner! Another example of Squire Alford's fine financial hand; pushes everybody to the wall he can.

(JAMES comes over; takes copy.)

JAMES. Yes, he is a hard man—a hard man. (*Aside.*) And who knows it better than I? (*Returns to place.*)

DAVID (*opening another letter*). Ah, a letter from Jackson and Jackson. I wonder what they—um-m—— (*Reads. JAMES busy; does not notice.*) "David Bainbridge, Elmwood. Dear Sir: This is to inform you that in going over the affairs of our late client, Ezra Potter, we found them badly involved, owing to unfortunate investments he had made. Among other things, we found that he had recently disposed of the mortgage which he held on your property in Elmwood to some one to us unknown, but we trust to some one who will be as square in their dealings with you as we know our late client to have been. If we can serve you in any way in the matter, kindly let us know. Very truly yours, Jackson and Jackson." That's strange! Why didn't Potter let me know about this? I know he died very suddenly—probably that was the reason. Well, it will all come out right when I realize on those mining shares. I would never have raised the money on my property here had I not been certain of the outcome, and ——

Enter TOM., C. D.

TOM. They're coming. Just met them on the way home.
[*Exit, R. U. E.*]

Enter DICK and BESS., C. D.

DICK. What is it? Tommy said ——

(DAVID rises.)

DAVID. You're wanted over at the hotel, Dick. Some one hurt—wants to make a statement or something.

DICK. Poor fellow ! I'll go at once. Good-bye, Bessie.

[*Exit, c. D.*

BESS. How ^odreadful. I hope it is not as bad —

DAVID (*putting on coat and hat*). Dr. Brown says he can't live. I think I'll go over and see if I can find out more about it. Bess, you tell mother where I've gone. I'll come back in a few minutes.

[*Exit, c. D.*

JAMES (*coming down*). Bessie, your father has just told me that you and Dick are to be married. Will you permit me to congratulate you, and to say—as I have just said to him—that nothing I could have heard would have pleased me as much as this, or have been such welcome news?

BESS. Thank you, Mr. Wentworth. I knew you would feel as you do. You have always been so kind and so considerate ever since I have known you, and I have often found myself wondering —

JAMES. My dear child, there may be reasons why ; but I must go now ; not, however, before I give you my best wishes for your future happiness.

[*Exit, R. U. E.*

BESS. (*looking after him*). I wonder what he meant by reasons ? I have heard him say things like that before. He is a dear old man, though, and if there is anything in his past about which he does not care to speak, it is his affair, not ours. (*Goes over to desk.*) I wonder if there was any mail for me this morning ? Yes, here is a letter for Miss Elizabeth Bainbridge. Elizabeth ! Doesn't that look queer ? (*Looks at postmark.*) And from some one in Elmwood, too. Ha ! Ha ! The idea of any one here calling me anything but Bessie ; it's too funny. Well, I guess the only way to solve the mystery is to open it. And they say that's the last thing a woman does. (*Tears letter open ; reads.*) "My dear Miss Elizabeth : Perhaps you will be surprised at the contents of this note, but they will no doubt appeal to your reason, and I hope to your heart as well. I have long admired you, and now that you have grown to womanhood and are old enough to manage an establishment, I desire to offer you my heart and hand. There is no need for me to say that I am able to support a wife in much better style than any other man in Elmwood. You will have all that a woman's heart can desire once you are installed in my home as its mistress. Or, should it be your wish, we can leave Elmwood with all its groveling inhabitants, and

create a new home in some more congenial place. Do not decide hastily; take a day or two; I can wait. Hoping that your reply may be favorable, I am, yours devotedly, Francis Alford." Well, of all the absurd things I ever heard of! Squire Alford! The old—old—what was it Dicky called him this morning? Oh, "curmudgeon,"—the old curmudgeon,—wants to marry me. Ha! Ha! Ha! isn't that rich? (*Sits in chair, R., and laughs until she cries.*) Oh, my! (*Wipes her eyes.*) If that isn't the funniest thing I ever heard of. Oh, if Dicky was only here. (*Changes her mood, jumps up and stamps foot angrily.*) No, it's not funny at all; it's insulting, positively insulting. Squire Alford knows that Dicky and I have always been—I suppose he thinks this would be a good way to revenge himself on Dicky for having left him as soon as he was old enough to realize that it was the squire's treatment of his poor mother that finally drove her to her grave. He always bore Dicky a grudge because he was independent and worked his way up by his own efforts; but if he thinks this plan will work, he is sadly mistaken. I'll show this to ——— (*Pauses.*) No, that will do no good. I'll send him a very decided answer, and when we are married I'll show it to Dicky, and we will have a good laugh over it together.

(MRS. B. *heard calling off L.*)

MRS. B. Bessie—Bessie! (*Enters, L. U.E.*) Oh, here you are. I need you in the house now, dear.

(BESS. *conceals letter.*)

BESS. Yes, mother, I'm coming.

[*Exeunt together, L. U. E.*]

Enter SQUIRE ALFORD, C. D.

SQUIRE. No one here? Well, what could you expect in a place that is run by a man who has no more idea of business than Bainbridge has? A fool, who'd rather laugh than work. I wonder if the girl has received my note yet? I suppose she will be a little surprised at first, maybe a trifle unwilling, but I think I have a way of bringing her to consider the matter from my point of view. (*Laughs meanly.*) I—think—I—have, and if Bainbridge and his wife prove obstinate ——— (*Taps his breast pocket significantly.*) Well, I have something which will either bring them to terms or else afford me the

means of paying off the old score which has stood for so many years.

(*Takes up paper from table, R., and looks at it.*)

Enter JAMES, unobserved, R. U. E.

JAMES (*aside*). He here? What can he want? This man whose very presence is a menace to all that is good or true.

SQUIRE (*looking up*). Oh, good-morning. Don't seem to be very busy around here to-day.

JAMES. Good-morning, Squire Alford.

SQUIRE. Where's Bainbridge?

JAMES. I think he is down town.

SQUIRE. Hm, nice time to be gadding about when his paper is supposed to be going to press.

JAMES. That part of the work is going on; *I* attend to that.

SQUIRE. Huh—you.

JAMES. David went down to find out something about a poor fellow—a tramp—who was fatally injured by a train this morning.

SQUIRE. I heard about it. Served him right. 'Twould be a good thing if all of these gentry were ground up on the railroad.

JAMES. I do not agree with you. They are an unfortunate class, but when they suffer, they are entitled to the same sympathy we would expect to receive under like circumstances.

SQUIRE (*sneeringly*). No doubt, no doubt, from your point of view. Why, I guess if the truth were known, you wasn't much better than a tramp yourself when you landed in Elmwood.

JAMES. It may be true that I was a poor man at that time, Squire Alford, and even now, I am not possessed of much in the way of what *you* might regard wealth, but (*with a peculiar emphasis*) I was, as I have *ever* been, an honest man, with naught but good will toward all my fellow creatures. Can you say as much?

SQUIRE (*angrily*). Bosh! At least I am no canting hypocrite like you. And, say,—while we are on this subject, I will take the liberty to observe that this is not the first time you have tried to air your superior virtues at my expense, nor the first time you have meddled with my affairs either; and I warn you, there is a limit to my tolerance. I do not know why it is, but for a number of years I have known of your attempts to

thwart my plans. Why you have done so is a mystery to some extent, but one that I will solve. It has got to be stopped, do you understand?

JAMES. If I have meddled with your affairs, as you term it, it has been for the sake of some poor soul whom you were trying to oppress in some way; and I tell you plainly, that should occasion demand it, I would again be found trying to assist, aye, and protect any one who might be so unfortunate as to fall into your mercenary grasp.

SQUIRE. Well, we will see about —

Enter DAVID and DICK, C. D. They exchange greetings with SQUIRE, not overcordially.

JAMES. What is the word in regard to the accident?

DAVID (*taking off coat and hat and hanging them up*). The poor fellow is gone, James; died just after making a deposition—some might call it a confession—before Dick here.

SQUIRE. Common thief, I suppose.

DICK. Yes, Mr. Wentworth, it was a confession—rather a strange story—something that happened twenty-three years ago in another state. Here it is. (*Shows paper.*) Copies of it have been sent to the city papers, at his request, hoping that it might thus come to the notice of those who would remember the facts, and by its aid be enabled to establish the innocence of a person who was wrongfully convicted of a crime at the time referred to.

JAMES. What! Where was —

(Appears faint and sinks into a chair. DAVID and DICK run to his assistance; SQUIRE does not notice the rest; seems to be absorbed in thought down L. F.)

Enter MRS. B. and BESS., L.

MRS. B. What is it?

DAVID. A glass of water, quick. James is faint.

(BESS. pours glass of water from pitcher on table and gives to JAMES.)

SQUIRE (*aside*). Twenty-three years ago! Why, that was — (*Collects himself.*) Pshaw! That's impossible. Every one concerned has been dead for years.

JAMES (*recovering*). Thank you, thank you—it was nothing—the heat perhaps. I am all —

Enter MESSENGER BOY, C. D., with a telegram.

MESSENGER BOY. Telegram for Mr. Bainbridge.

DAVID. For me?

(Takes telegram; signs book. Exit MESSENGER BOY, whistling. DAVID opens envelope and reads; falls into chair at desk and buries face in hands. He groans and seems much overcome.)

MRS. B. *(standing over him)*. David, what is it?

BESS. *(taking the message from his hand)*. Let me read it. *(Reads aloud.)* "David Bainbridge, Elmwood. Sorry to inform you—bottom has fallen out of mining investment—a swindle—more by letter. Simpson."

(MRS. B. puts her arm around DAVID; BESS. kneels by his chair holding his hand; DICK and JAMES stand near; all in group.)

SQUIRE *(standing aloof, aside)*. Everything is playing into my hands. *(Turns to the rest.)* This is no surprise to me. I predicted something of the kind all along—in fact, I knew that —

DICK *(indignantly)*. You knew? What did you know?

SQUIRE. Don't get excited, my young bantam friend; yes, I knew for some time the sort of man you people were dealing with—that is, I mean I had heard —

DICK *(angrily)*. You knew—you had heard! And yet you allowed your friends and neighbors to be the victims of a rascal, without lifting a hand to save them. Squire Alford, I have always known you were a hard man, but I would never have believed you were capable of such baseness as —

SQUIRE. Be careful what you say, young man; there are witnesses here, and *(sneeringly)* the little you know of the law should teach you that you cannot slander people with impunity.

BESS. Dicky, don't talk to him.

JAMES. Don't take it so hard, David; you know the mortgage is in good hands.

DAVID. It was, James, it was; but I received a letter only this morning saying that it had changed hands, and I do not know *who* holds it now; if I did —

SQUIRE. Oh, that reminds me of what I called to see you about this morning, Bainbridge. The—er—mortgage on your property came into *my* possession recently in the—ah—way of

business, in fact, as part payment on a note of the late Ezra Potter's which I held. Of course I did not know at the time that there —

DAVID. What!—You hold the mortgage on my property?

DICK. Are you stating a fact, sir?

SQUIRE. You seem to imply that that would be an unusual thing for me to do,—but I will let that pass. (*Takes paper from pocket.*) Here is the document; it will speak for itself.

DICK. May I examine it?

SQUIRE. Certainly. (*Dick takes and examines paper.*) I think your highly cultivated legal mind will hardly find a flaw in it, and (*looking around*) I have no doubt the property is good for the amount involved.

DICK (*handing it back*). Yes,—it is true.

SQUIRE (*returning it to his pocket*). Um-m—thank you for your professional opinion.

JAMES (*aside, coming down*). Alford the owner of the mortgage on this peaceful home? Then may God help them.

(TABLEAU:—SQUIRE, L. F., *smiling*; JAMES *by table R., looking sadly at family group*; the rest at desk as before indicated, DICK *looking angrily at SQUIRE.*)

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE.—*Lawn of the Bainbridge home. House entrance on L.; across stage, back, a light fence; road outside fence; practical gateway, C. of fence; a swing back near gate; small tree or two; plants in tubs; small settees, R. and L. Back drop outdoor scene. BESS. discovered sitting on settee, R., with book or sewing.*

BESS. (*looking up*). Poor father! what a cruel blow this is to him—and to us all. To think we were so happy this morning, and the future appeared so bright, and now (*shaking her head sadly*) I wonder what is in store for us? If I only knew. Poor Dicky, how can I tell him of my resolve? But it must be. We are both young and can wait. My first duty is to the dear ones who have loved and cherished me through all the years of my life, and I will now have an opportunity to show them that all the love and sacrifice shall not be on one side. The loss of the money is bad enough, but that Squire Alford should have obtained possession of the mortgage is worse. He must have known this all when he wrote that letter! (*Rises indignantly.*) Why, of course he did—the wretch! But I wonder if he thought that we—that I——

Enter DRU. through gate.

DRU. Good-evenin', Bessie.

BESS. Good-evening. Won't you sit down, Aunt Drusie?

DRU. Thank you, my dear; jest for a minit or two. (*BESS. resumes her seat and work; DRU. sits L.*) I jest heard about th' trouble you was in. Whittier was tellin' me, so I thought I'd run down an' tell you how sorry I be for you. Is it true that Squire Alford has got a hold of that mortgage?

BESS. Yes, Aunt Drusie, it is; he showed it to us this morning; there is no doubt about his being in legal possession of it, so Dicky says.

DRU. Well, it's a shame, so it is; but surely this other story I heard ain't so, is it?

BESS. (*wearily*). I do not know what you allude to—what story do you mean?

DRU. Oh, I know it ain't so, but the way it come to me was that you was a-goin' to marry the old squire, an' if you did, then he was goin' to be kinder easy on your father about ——

BESS. (*indignantly*). Of course it is not true; who could have had so poor an opinion of me as to start such an absurd report?

DRU. There, that's jest what I told Lyddy Spooner—'twas her that told me—an' she said that Squire Alford sorter hinted the thing to her Job only this afternoon. I told her smack off I didn't believe no such thing, although him tellin' Job made it seem pretty straight like, and ——

BESS. Squire Alford is mistaken, or else he is deliberately stating something he knows to be untrue. I have never given him ——

DRU. Oh, if you say so, I know it's a lie, an' not the first one I have known to come from that quarter either. (*Rises.*) Well, I'm a-goin' into the house to see your pa an' ma. Now don't you go to gittin' down-hearted about this business, dear. I'm sure it will come out all right some way or 'nother.

BESS. Thank you, Aunt Drusie. I am sure I hope so. (*Exit DRU. into house, L.*) The idea of his being so mean—so base, as to start this report under the circumstances. What I feared then is true; he is going to use his power to coerce me into accepting his proposal, and he has not even given me time to refuse him. Oh, how could he *do* such a thing?

[*Exit into house, L.*]

Enter TOM. over the back fence.

TOM. (*out of breath*). Whew! Just had a race up the road with Whittier Jones. I hit him with a green apple and he put after me—Ha! Ha! I led him across a puddle in the road, and Whit tumbled in and got all covered with mud. Gee, you oughter see him! Ha! Ha! Ha! It was funny. (*Looks down road.*) Here he comes now. My, but he looks mad! But I ain't afraid of him; he can't scare me none; I know how to bring him 'round.

(*Jumps into swing.* WHIT. *enters gate; he is all splashed with mud.*)

WHIT. You young whelp! Look at me—this is your work.

TOM. (*swinging idly*). Ha! Ha! Whit, you look as if you had just slid into the home plate on a close decision, with two out and one run needed to tie the score.

WHIT. You come here and help get this mud off, you brat, or I'll —

TOM. You quit callin' me names. I didn't push you into the puddle. If you didn't have such big feet you'd —

WHIT. You led me into it, anyway.

TOM. Well, I'll help fix you up, but don't you try any funny business. (*Goes over*; WHIT. *grabs for him*; TOM. *eludes him*.) Ya-a-h, smarty; no you don't. Say, Whit, if I help fix you up real pretty, will you let me alone?

WHIT. Well, I —

TOM. (*returning to swing*). All right; if you think I'm —

WHIT. No, I won't do anything.

TOM. Honest Injun? (*Comes over warily*.)

WHIT. Yes, honest.

TOM. I ain't got a handkerchief.

WHIT. Here, take mine.

(TOM. *starts to clean off mud*.)

TOM. (*working away*). Say, Whit, I heard somebody say something about you the other day.

WHIT. Did you? Who was it, Tommy?

TOM. (*looking him over*). There, now, you look quite respectable. (*Goes back to swing*.)

WHIT. (*sitting L.*). Who did you say it was?

TOM. (*swinging gently*). Who what was?

WHIT. Why, you said you heard —

TOM. Oh, yes, I heard somebody say something about your po'try.

WHIT. (*coaxingly*). Who was it, Tommy—what did she say?

TOM. I didn't say 'twas a she, did I?

WHIT. Oh, come now—that's a good little boy.

TOM. Say, look here, who be you callin' little? I —

WHIT. Excuse me, I didn't mean that.

TOM. Do you want to know real bad, Whit?

WHIT. Of course I do.

TOM. Well, you come and push me, an' I'll tell you.

(WHIT. *goes over and swings him*; *they continue talking meanwhile*.)

WHIT. Come, now, tell me who it was.

TOM. Wait, Whit; wait till I tell you what she said first.

WHIT. Oh, it was a lady, was it? (*Aside.*) I was sure I would make an impression, once she knew to whom my sentiments were addressed.

TOM. Yep, it was a woman all right—and she said your pomes were the real thing.

WHIT. The real thing?

TOM. Yep, outer sight, y' know—the regular candy goods.

WHIT. I don't exactly understand—I ———

TOM. What, don't you know English? Well, maybe them wasn't just her words, but 'twas what she meant.

WHIT. Oh, I see.

TOM. U-huh. She said your verses contained such tender sentiment—they had so much soul into them.

WHIT. (*eagerly*). Did she?

TOM. Sure—that's what; an' she said you was wastin' your sweetness on the desert air here in Elmwood—and you'd be heard from some day.

(WHIT. *leaves swing; comes down R.; aside.*)

WHIT. She has recognized my genius at last,—perhaps my devotion. I need hardly ask her name—I know—I feel ———

TOM. (*standing by fence*). Want to know who 'twas, Whit?

WHIT. I think I can guess, but you may tell me if you wish.

(TOM. *vaults fence.*)

TOM. (*edging off*). Well, it was ———

WHIT. Yes ———?

TOM. It was—your Aunt Drusie. Ha! Ha! Ha!

(*Runs down the road, L. WHIT. starts to follow, but comes back.*)

WHIT. The young scapegrace! He made that up.

(*Sits R. and takes manuscript from pocket; reads to himself.*)

Enter JAMES through gate, from R., with DICK.

JAMES. Now, my dear boy, pray do not let this silly gossip disturb you; it is the utmost nonsense.

DICK. I know that, Mr. Wentworth, but it makes my blood

boil to think of such talk going on around the village. I must see Bessie at once.

JAMES. That's right; but do not say anything to further agitate this poor family if you can avoid it. They have enough to bear now.

DICK (*grasping his hand*). No fear of that; do not have any anxiety on that score, my dear old friend. I know our hearts and sympathies are one in this matter.

[*Exit into house, L.*]

JAMES. Poor boy,—poor friends! I fear this is but too true—there is no villainy of which this man is not capable. But there must be some way to balk him in this thing he contemplates—there *shall* be, even if my own cherished hopes crumble into dust. If the worst *must* come, then I will cheerfully abide the results, be they what they may, for the sake of these dear people whose home has been a haven of refuge for me during these many peaceful years, even though it may mean the sundering of the ties which bind me so closely to them.

(*Drops into seat, L.*)

WHIT. (*looking up from his manuscript*). Ah, good-evening, Mr. Wentworth.

JAMES. How do you do, Whittier? I did not see you.

WHIT. No; I was absorbed in my manuscript. May I venture to—ah—read this to you, Mr. Wentworth? I have great respect for your literary judgment, and I would very much like to have your opinion on it before I—ah——

JAMES. Certainly, my boy, if you think my poor opinion is worth anything. (*Shakes his head aside.*)

WHIT. (*reading*). “To one who will understand.

“The bee that from the clover bloom
The sticky honey sips,
Drinks nothing half so sweet, my love,
As honey of thy lips.

(JAMES *throws up hands and shakes head aside.*)

And all the little stars at night,
Which twinkle in the sky,
Glow not so bright as does, my sweet,
Thy blue and——”

JAMES. Pardon me a moment, my dear boy, but does this—er—poem have any personal application?

WHIT. Why—ah—perhaps it——

JAMES (*laying his hand on WHIT.'s shoulder*). Now listen to me. You have asked my opinion, and you shall have it, even though it may affect the kindly relations which have heretofore existed between us.

WHIT. Do not fear anything of that kind, sir. I have too high a regard for you to allow——

JAMES. I am glad to hear you say this, for, to borrow an expression of our poor friend David Bainbridge, the stuff which you write is the “veriest rot,” and the sooner you disabuse your mind of the idea that it will ever yield you anything beyond a little local notoriety, the better it will be for you. Why, the people who publish the leading periodicals of the day would not use such matter to kindle their fires with. (WHIT. *sinks dejectedly into seat.*) It is simply hopeless from a literary standpoint. I am sorry if this hurts you, but it is better to apply the knife while there is yet time to effect a cure, than it is to wait until the disease is past remedy. I think your Aunt Drucilla is much to blame for having flattered you all these years. And there is another thing; we will mention no names, but when I asked you if this—this poem had a personal application, you know what I meant. Let me tell you there is no hope in that quarter—absolutely none—so don't think of it—or, as Tommy says—“forget it;” try to bring your mind to the idea of taking up some useful occupation for which you are better fitted. I know there is good timber in you—you are young, and—— (*Enter MARY from house, L., with basket on her arm.*) Ah, here is Mary. Good-evening, Mary.

MARY. How do you do? I was just going down to the garden to get some vegetables, and——

JAMES. Well, here is Whittier. I know he is only waiting for an invitation to go along and carry that basket.

MARY. Oh, perhaps Mr. Whittier is more pleasantly engaged.

WHIT. Not at all; I shall be most happy. Allow me. (*Takes basket; they go R.; WHIT. returns and takes JAMES's hand.*) I want to thank you for what you have just said. I believe you are right, sir. I will think it over and——

JAMES. That's right, and come to me at any time if you think I can be helpful in any way——

(Looks at MARY; takes WHIT. aside and says something in a low tone.)

WHIT. (*aside, also glancing at MARY*). Do you think so?

JAMES (*laughing*). How blind you are. She is a good, sweet girl. Now don't keep her waiting any longer. (*Pushes him R.; MARY and WHIT. exeunt R., together. Enter DAVID from house, L.*) David, have you seen any of the other people who were interested in the mining scheme? May there not be some mistake, after all?

DAVID. No, James, the letter from Simpson came in this evening's mail, and he says that while the property is all right,—in fact, will pay handsome returns—this rascally agent, by his knowledge of the mining laws and by manipulation of the stock, has succeeded in getting it all into the hands of himself and some one in the background, and has thus swindled the honest investors out of all they put into it—another specimen of modern high finance.

JAMES. Perhaps there is some hope yet.

DAVID. I wish I could think so, but there is little hope in fighting swindlers whom our laws protect.

JAMES. Well, don't be down-hearted. Let us walk down toward the river and talk over the situation together.

[*Exeunt together, R.*]

Enter DICK and BESS. from house, L.

BESS. It is no use to argue the matter, Dicky; my mind is made up on this point.

DICK. But surely, Bessie, we can do as much for your parents if we are married as you could by going away, and besides —

BESS. No, you know that is impossible. I shall work for them now as long as they need me. I know the many sacrifices they have made in the past in order that my education might be completed, and now I will show them that they were not made in vain. I know of a position which I can have, and I have already written about it. We can wait—we *must* wait.

DICK. But think what this means to me, dear. I —

BESS. To you? Does it not mean more to me? Don't be selfish, Dicky; think of me and my dear ones in trouble. (*Handkerchief.*)

DICK. Forgive me, dear, I was wrong. It shall be as you say, and if it must be, I will wait for years, cheered by the

thought that when the happy time does come, it will bring to me the best and the sweetest little woman on earth.

(Takes her in his arms and kisses her ; they then stroll off together, R. SQUIRE appears beyond gate, back, during DICK's last speech ; he listens and observes ; comes down after they exeunt.)

SQUIRE *(looking after them)*. Oh, fine—very fine, indeed ! Umph ! I was not mistaken—they are engaged ; but if they think I will allow a little matter like that to stand in my way they do not know me. I have swept stronger men from my path than this young whippersnapper, and what I have done I can do again. I think my young lady will change her views in regard to the choice of a husband when she faces the alternative of seeing her family facing the loss of a home and the means of livelihood as well,—perhaps compelled to leave “dear old Elmwood.” *(Laughs.)* Oh, I think I have the situation well in hand. *(Enter MRS. B. from house, L.)* Ah, good-evening, Elizabeth. I—— *(Bows.)*

MRS. B. Mrs. Bainbridge to you, sir. To what do we owe the honor of this visit ?

SQUIRE. Pray pardon me, madam—I thought that old friendship might entitle me to——

MRS. B. Old acquaintance, if you wish, but please do not make use of a word of which you never knew the meaning. But there, I trust you will excuse me. I do not desire to quarrel with or seem discourteous to a guest ; my heart is too greatly burdened just now. Will you be seated ? I would like to talk with you a moment about this mortgage.

(SQUIRE sits R., MRS. B. L.)

SQUIRE *(very pleasantly)*. Certainly—certainly, my dear madam ; to tell the truth, it was about that little matter I came around here this evening—in fact to say that you and David need give yourselves no uneasiness on that score. I obtained the mortgage by the merest chance—a—a business transaction, you know, and like all matters of business, this whole thing can be arranged to the great advantage of all concerned, by mutual agreement.

MRS. B. *(aside)*. How easy it is to divine his evil intent ! But it shall never be—never ! *(To SQUIRE.)* Squire Alford, when is this mortgage due ?

SQUIRE. Oh, I don't know; but it doesn't matter in the least; long before that time I will ——

MRS. B. I wish to know; will you kindly answer my question?

SQUIRE. Well, I believe it has three months more to run.

MRS. B. I suppose you would be willing to extend it, if we cannot meet it at that time?

SQUIRE (*generously*). I will do better than that; I will cancel—destroy it to-night, if David and you ——

MRS. B. (*coldly*). No, there is no reason for you to do that—it is a just obligation, and there will be some way, I know ——

SQUIRE. Come, don't let us temporize; it is but a waste of time. You know the conditions I attach to the cancellation of the mortgage I hold on this property and business, do you not?

MRS. B. Perhaps. Oh, I feared ——

SQUIRE. Your daughter has told you of my proposal?

MRS. B. She has, although she did not intend doing so at first. But this—after this ——

SQUIRE. She did quite right—quite right. Of course, some might think there was a little disparity in our ages, but that is only a matter of sentiment after all, and sentiment has to stand aside with us of maturer years, when it encounters—er—I might say business considerations, and expediency in matrimonial affairs.

MRS. B. But surely you do not intend to press this matter now, just because you happen to have it in your power to dictate terms to us?

SQUIRE. Why make use of such harsh language? I mean well by the girl—she will have all that a woman's heart can desire ——

MRS. B. "All"? No, not all. What do you know of the desires of a good woman's heart? Bessie has now all that a true woman seeks—the love of an honest, manly heart; what is all that you offer compared to this?

SQUIRE. Bah! a poor young cub of a lawyer. Do you think he will stand in my way?

MRS. B. (*rising*). It is useless to prolong this discussion, Squire Alford. Bessie will marry Dick,—when, I do not know, but at some time, you may rest assured—and when she does ——

SQUIRE (*rising*). I advise you to think well before ——

MRS. B. We have thought well—and as for you, it matters not what course you may choose to pursue in regard to the mortgage; that will be for you to decide, but should you do your worst, it would make no difference; the hand of a pure young girl like Bessie Bainbridge is not for a man of the character of Francis Alford.

SQUIRE. You think so, do you? Well, wait; at all events, I see that time has not changed those highfalutin ideas of yours. I have not forgotten the day you turned me down for the “poverty-stricken ink-slinger” whom you married. Time may have dulled, but it has never obliterated the memory of your choice. I said then that the time would come when you would have cause to regret that day, and now—now, fate has so played into my hand that I am able, if I choose, to bring about the fulfilment of my own prophecy.

MRS. B. Never! I repeat,—never will you have the power to make me regret it. Rather have I thanked God every day of my life that he gave me to David Bainbridge, a man whose dearest possession is that which your wealth can never buy—the love, and the esteem of all who know him.

Enter DAVID and JAMES, R.

SQUIRE (*shaking his cane, angrily*). Well, he'll need all the friends he's got before I get through with him.

DAVID (*coming between them, sternly*). What does this mean, Alford? What was he saying, mother?

MRS. B. He came here to follow up that letter which he sent to Bessie. I have told him that we ——

DAVID. Wait a moment. Squire Alford, are you really in earnest in this matter?

SQUIRE. I am. I want the girl and I think it would be wise for you to consent.

DAVID. Consent? Consent to our daughter marrying you, whose whole career has been a shame and a reproach to honest manhood? No, we would sooner see her sleeping peacefully under the trees, over on the green hill yonder, than wedded to you, and I warn you ——

JAMES. David, David, don't say anything you may have cause to ——

SQUIRE (*angrily*). Let him say what he chooses; it will all go into the reckoning which will come when this house and all it contains goes under the hammer.

DAVID. Until that time does come, however, this house is mine, and it is for me to say who is welcome here.

(Points toward the gate.)

Enter WHIT. and MARY. R., WHIT. carries basket of garden stuff. They cross and stand back L. DICK and BESS. follow them, and stop R., listening.

SQUIRE *(walking to gate and turning back)*. Very well, it is your turn now, but mine will come later—in three months.

Enter TOM. at gate, running; he has a paper in his hand, and bumps into SQUIRE in his haste.

TOM. Here is the evening paper from the city, Mr. Bainbridge, with the account of the accident, and the tramp's story in it.

DICK *(stepping forward)*. Let me have it, Tommy, please. I would like to see if they have it straight. *(Takes paper.)* I was about to read it this morning, when that telegram came and put it out of my mind.

BESS. Read it to us now, Dicky.

DAVID. Yes, let us hear it, Dick. Poor fellow! his troubles are over at least.

(DRU. comes out of house L., and remains by MARY as DICK reads paper. SQUIRE stands listening also just outside gate.)

DICK. "Fatal accident on the rail, in the village of Elmwood. A strange story." Um-m—you know all about the accident. I'll not read that part, only the deposition—here it is: "Realizing that he had but a short time to live, he asked for a notary, to whom he dictated the following statement: 'Twenty-three years ago I assisted in the robbery of a bank in a small city in one of the Eastern states. My partner in the crime was a resident of the place and a supposed respected citizen. He furnished all needed information, skeleton keys, etc. *(SQUIRE listening intently, comes forward slowly, and as though unconsciously. JAMES, at the word "robbery" drops on settee R., appearing agitated, and with his chin in his hand, listens to the recital)*, and I did the job. He took charge of the cash—a large sum—but before we could divide, I was arrested, tried for the crime, convicted and sentenced for twenty years. The

other man was not suspected, and I did not peach on him, as he promised to divide with my family and look out for them while I was doing time; but after many years I found out that he had lied to me. He kept the money himself, and as I have since learned, contrived to throw suspicion on another party—an innocent man, who by his false testimony was also convicted of complicity in the robbery—but who succeeded in escaping from jail before he could be sentenced, and was never recaptured. My real accomplice married within a year, and left for parts unknown. Since my release from prison I have spent nearly three years trying to get a trace of this man, so that I might see him brought to justice, and the name of an innocent man cleared of crime; but my search is now ended by this accident which I know is fatal. I had found a clue (SQUIRE *starts*) which led in this direction, but now—quick, take down these names—mine is Jim Foster, the—oh, I am afraid I can't—the innocent man (*both SQUIRE and JAMES listen intently here*) was—Allen—Allen Ormsby, and the other,—who did for us both, was—was ——' At this point the unfortunate man expired without revealing the state, city, or name of the one person most essential to the carrying out of his purpose, so this will probably nullify any attempts which might otherwise be made to establish the truth of this very strange story."

(SQUIRE *draws a deep breath, removes hat, mops face with handkerchief*; JAMES *watches him unobserved.*)

MRS. B. What a strange story.

DAVID. Strange, indeed.

SQUIRE (*sneeringly*). Bah! A lot of balderdash. The poor fool was probably out of his mind.

(*Goes out gate, pauses and watches the others, who exeunt*; WHIT. and DRU. *go out gate and off R.*; TOM. *goes out gate and off L.*; *the others exeunt into house, L.*)

JAMES (*rising; aside*). At last—at last, the truth! It was as I always suspected. *Now ——*

SQUIRE (*returning*). See here. You heard what was said here a while ago? I suppose they are determined to oppose my marrying the girl. Well, I think I can stand it, if they can (*laughing*), but what I want to say to you is this: When this mortgage is due, I shall of course foreclose; that will make me manager, or at any rate proprietor, of the business, Elmwood

Item and all, and when I am, your services will not be required around here, so you may look upon this as a notice to leave, and you may consider yourself fortunate to get it so far in advance.

JAMES. When that time arrives, you need have no fear of my seeking to remain in the employ of one who oppresses the innocent and the unfortunate—whose *past record* is stained with ——

SQUIRE. Have a care, sir. What do you know of my past record? I never saw or heard of you until you tramped into Elmwood.

JAMES (*hotly*). You ask what I know? I will tell you. By a strange coincidence I have learned to-day what I have long suspected to be the truth, but which I have never been able to prove. You have just heard the story of this unfortunate man, who ——

SQUIRE. The ravings of a disordered brain; it did not interest me.

JAMES. It will interest you, perhaps, when I charge you with being the man alluded to—the man whose name remained unspoken.

SQUIRE (*startled*). You lie! You shall pay for this. I'll ——

(*Threatens with his cane.*)

JAMES. I do not lie. No one knows better than you that I tell the truth.

SQUIRE. I know you are as crazy as this tramp—this fool. Who are you, who *dares* to make this slanderous statement against the foremost citizen of Elmwood?

JAMES. Who am I? (*Laughs bitterly.*) No wonder you ask; the marks of suffering which have been imprinted on my face by *your* treachery have proven an effectual disguise through all these years; but look at me closely, Francis Alford—thief and robber, not of money alone, but of the honor and good name of an innocent man—and worse than that, the deceiver of his wife, and abductor of his child. (*SQUIRE retreats.*) No wonder you cringe before me, the victim of your infamy and lust. Do I need to say who I am? Do I need to speak the name?

SQUIRE (*shaking*). No, no! You are not ——

(*Sinks into seat overcome.*)

JAMES. I am—Allen Ormsby, the man who was ruined by

your false testimony twenty-three years ago—the man whose wife you took from him by your lying tongue—the man who, learning that the woman he loved, and whom you deceived, was dead of a broken heart, came here where he might be near and watch over the only being left on earth for him to love—the boy whom you stole away from him. And the man who has been waiting all these years for the day to come when he could tear the mask from your false face and hold you up to the scorn and contempt which you so justly merit ——

SQUIRE (*recovering; starts up angrily*). This is all a pack of lies. You have trumped up this yarn as a means of injuring me in the eyes of my neighbors, and besides (*forgetting himself*) Ormsby is dead. I heard ——

JAMES. Ah! Then you admit ——?

SQUIRE. I admit nothing. (*With a sudden thought.*) But what if I did? Suppose I admitted a part of what you say—what proof have you of these charges? What weight do you think the story of a tramp printer, and the disjointed and incomplete statement of another fool of the same stripe, would have against that of Squire Alford, the richest man in the county? I defy you—yes, you—if you are this man—this Ormsby, for then by your own confession you are an escaped convict, a fugitive from justice, and a word from me to the proper authorities in—in—well, you know where—would result in your being taken back to the jail from which you fled. (*JAMES sits down; thinks deeply; SQUIRE follows up his advantage.*) Oh, this is no one man's game we are playing; there are hands here for two (*going and standing by the gate*), and we will see who holds the higher cards, you or I.

(*Tableau: SQUIRE by gate looking triumphant; JAMES on settee, R., with face buried in hands.*)

CURTAIN

ACT III

SCENE.—*A parlor in the Bainbridge home. Plainly but tastefully furnished. Three months are supposed to have elapsed between Acts II and III. MARY discovered sweeping and arranging furniture. Door in flat back c.*

MARY. Oh, dear, this does not seem like the same place here that it was before, now that all this trouble about that old mortgage has had to come to the family. I don't know what they are going to do, and I'm afraid they don't know themselves. I hate to think of leaving them; they have always been so kind to me that it seems like leaving my own home. But Mrs. Bainbridge says they will likely have to give the place up to Squire Alford. The old miser! I don't see how any one can be such an old wretch as he is. I wish he would come in (*turning to door c.*) that door now (*raising broom*), I'd —

Enter WHIT. at door c.

WHIT. (*dodging broom*). Hold on there, Mary! Did you take me for a book agent, or a census taker, or somebody of that sort?

MARY (*laughing*). No, Whittier; worse than that, I guess. I was just thinking of Squire Alford, and how I would like to give him what he deserves.

WHIT. (*laughing*). I thought you appeared rather warlike; but I hardly know whether to feel complimented or not at being taken for our great fellow citizen.

MARY. Great scoundrel would be a more fitting term for him.

WHIT. I'll not dispute that; however, I think it would take more than a common broom wielded by such dainty hands as yours to do the subject justice.

MARY (*pleased at the compliment*). Now, Whittier, don't you go to being foolish. How is everything going down at the store, now?

WHIT. Very satisfactorily for me. I like the place, and Mr. Smith is a fine man to work for, I tell you.

(*He sits R.* MARY resumes her work.)

MARY. But it does not give you much time for your literary work though, does it?

WHIT. Well, no, it does not; but to tell the truth, I am so busy I do not seem to have time to think of such things any more; and as Mr. Smith has promised me a better position at the end of the half year, I think business will claim my attention, to the exclusion of that which I have now learned to look upon as a foolish fancy.

MARY. I am so glad. Mr. Wentworth always said you had ability, if it could only be directed into the proper channels.

WHIT. (*warmly*). Mr. Wentworth was a fine old man, Mary. I owe all this to him—to his good advice—and his influence with Mr. Smith.

MARY. It seems so strange here without him in the house. It is now nearly three months since he went away so suddenly.

WHIT. Have they had no word from him in that time?

MARY. Not that I know of; and with Miss Bessie away too, it does not seem like the same place. (*She sits L.*)

WHIT. I understand she is expected home to-day.

MARY. Yes, this is the day, you know, that has been set by Squire Alford for a final decision on the mortgage. But what can they do? It is easy to foresee the result, isn't it? A shame to think of their actually being turned out of their own home at their time of life! (*Tears.*) It makes my heart ache.

WHIT. 'Tis a shame, indeed. I cannot understand Alford's reason for being so relentless.

MARY. Ugh! don't speak of him. Mrs. Bainbridge says I will have to look for another place, and how can I find one? I have tried, but ——

WHIT. (*rising*). Don't let that disturb you, dear. Of course I have expected this, and—and, in fact, I have a place in view for you ——

MARY (*rising*). Why, Whittier,—you?

WHIT. Yes, and one which I think—or at least I hope—you will like even better than this.

MARY (*astonished*). How could you have heard, when I ——

WHIT. Oh, I happen to know of some one who has been living at quite a distance from the village, but who for business reasons finds it necessary to live in town. This—er—person of whom I speak will need a housekeeper, and he would ——

MARY (*inquiringly*). He?

WHIT. (*coming over and taking her hands*). Yes, he, dear ; can you not guess whom I mean ?

MARY (*looking down*). Why—no, that is,—I ——

WHIT. (*lifting up her chin ; looks in her eyes*). Can't you guess, little girl ?

MARY (*dropping her face to his shoulder*). Oh, Whittier !

(TOM. *appears R. ; gives a long whistle.*)

TOM. Oh, Whit, what will Aunt Drusie say ?

MARY (*jumping away*). You little torment !

(*Grabs broom and chases TOM. around room. They all laugh.*)

WHIT. (*with arm around MARY*). Oh, I don't think it will make any difference what any one thinks, will it, Mary ?

TOM. Say, Mary, will there be frosted cake at the weddin' ?

MARY (*charging with broom*). Get out, you little imp.

[*Exit TOM., C. D.*

WHIT. (*laughing ; consults watch*). I must go—time I was at the store. Good-bye, dear. (*Kisses her.*)

MARY (*removing apron*). Wait—I'll walk a little way with you. [*They exeunt C. D., together.*

Enter DAVID and MRS. B., L.

DAVID. It's no use, mother (*dropping into chair, as she stands beside him*), I have been trying everywhere to raise enough money to get the mortgage out of his hands, but it simply can't be done. All of my friends who would ordinarily be glad of a chance to balk Alford, are as hard hit by this mining business as we are. They are willing enough, but their hands are tied.

MRS. B. Is he coming here to-day ?

DAVID. I believe so ; but he had much better stay away. It will only result in another row, like all our former "negotiations," as he calls this damnable proposition of his.

MRS. B. Hush, David !

DAVID. I can't help using strong language, mother, when I think of this infernal scheme by which he thought to coerce our Bessie into marrying him—the old ——

MRS. B. David,—don't say anything you will regret. You know I feel as you do—and of course our answer and Bessie's

will always be the same. Dear girl, it is nearly time for her train, is it not?

DAVID. Yes. Dick is at the station waiting to bring her up.

MRS. B. Poor boy!

DAVID. Yes; but do you know, I believe Dick is the most cheerful one of us all. Sometimes I think ——

(Pauses thoughtfully.)

MRS. B. *(after a moment)*. What?

DAVID. Oh, it's absurd, of course, but I have had a feeling lately that there must be some reason why Dick appeared so much more hopeful than the rest of us; not so much from anything he has said, as from his manner.

MRS. B. I have noticed it too, but there can be no reason for it, I am sure, only the natural hopefulness of youth. Bessie seems the same, judging from her letters. It is just their way of trying to cheer us up. Bless their hearts! Hark! I think I hear them coming now.

(Voices heard outside; DAVID and MRS. B. start for door c., as DICK and BESS. enter.)

BESS. Mother! *(They embrace.)*

DAVID. Well, little girl, home again at last. *(Kisses her.)*

BESS. Yes, father, home at last. How good it is.

(Pauses.)

DAVID *(turning away; shakes his head)*. It does indeed seem good, my child; but how long shall we have a—a—home for you to come to?

(Chokes; drops into a chair.)

BESS. *(kneeling beside him)*. Dear father, don't—don't; let us forget about it for a little while. I feel sure there will be some way ——

DICK *(cheerfully)*. Yes, Mr. Bainbridge, "where there's life there's hope," you know. There is still one more day, and sometimes a good deal may happen in a very short space of time. I must go now *(consulting watch)*; it is time for the afternoon mail, and I am expecting—er—we are quite busy at the office, so good-day. Good-bye, Bessie; I will be back as soon as I can.

BESS. *(rising, joins MRS. B.)*. Good-bye, Dicky.

DAVID. Good-bye, my boy. (*Exit DICK, C. D.*) Ah, my dear, Dick is one of the best. We have learned his true value during the last three months,—always cheerful, always helpful, and since James left us so suddenly, he has seemed to be more like our own than before.

BESS. How strange it was, the way Mr. Wentworth left here. Have you heard nothing from him yet?

DAVID. Only once—a week after he went, I think. I have the letter. (*Takes letters from pocket and selects one.*) Yes, here it is. (*Reads.*) “My dear David: I hope you will pardon my rather unceremonious departure, and that you will believe me when I say it was rendered necessary by reasons which I am not now at liberty to state. I cannot say when I shall return to Elmwood; it is my intention to do so, but it may be that I may never come back. In that event I wish to thank you and yours for all you have done in the past to make the life of a lonely old man a pleasant thing for him to remember during the few years which may yet be his. May heaven’s choicest blessings be yours. James Wentworth.”

BESS. What a mysterious letter! There must have been something (*a knock at the door unheeded by them*) very urgent, which called him away.

MRS. B. I have said all along that a man like James —

(*A louder knock. BESS. starts for door as SQUIRE enters.*)

SQUIRE. Humph! Sorry to intrude on such a happy little family reunion. I heard Miss Elizabeth had returned, and as I was going by the door I thought I would drop in and inquire how the “strenuous life” was agreeing with her. How is the school, my dear? Plenty of hard work, eh? I rather think you find working for a living rather different from what you expected—quite different in fact, from what I offered.

(*DAVID starts forward; MRS. B. restrains him.*)

BESS. (*interrupting; with dignity*). On the contrary, I like my school and my work very much; there are things which (*meaningly*) are much worse than earning an honest living.

SQUIRE (*sneeringly*). Of course—of course. I would not expect you to admit anything of the sort.

DAVID. I think you have said all that we care to listen to at the present time, if this is all you have paid us this visit for;

if, though, you have at last concluded to be more reasonable and grant me an extension until I can ——

SQUIRE. In regard to that matter, my former proposition is still open; if your daughter will reconsider what I have no doubt she now sees was an unwise resolution on her part, I will return this er—document to you—cancelled, or will burn it in your presence, as you may choose. There is yet ample time; it does not fall due until to-morrow, you know.

BESS. You may spare yourself further words. . Your proposition is an insult; I have told you this before, and I now repeat it, with all the emphasis at my command. I would rather work all the rest of my life, and die a single woman, than purchase our release from your remorseless grasp at such a price.

SQUIRE. Bah! You are quite dramatic, young woman. You remind me of that sneaking tramp printer who left Elmwood with such suspicious haste some time ago. Probably you got your lessons from him—however, I will give you a little longer to talk it over.

(Consults watch; goes toward door.)

DAVID. Stop! I will not hear a good¹ man slandered by you who is not here to defend himself. James Wentworth is a man who is respected by every one, a man who is all that you are not, and you know it.

SQUIRE (*angrily*). I do not know it, but I'll tell you (*re-turuing*) what I do know. I know this saint of yours is an escaped convict—a jail breaker, a ——

MRS. B. What do you mean?

SQUIRE. I mean only what I can prove, and what he knew I would prove, had he dared to stay here and give me the opportunity.

DAVID. It's false! As false as you are yourself, Squire Alford

Enter DRU. and MARY, C. D. MARY exit L. DRU. remains.

SQUIRE. It is a fact. This fellow, whom you have thought to be a model of all the manly virtues, has deceived you. I knew him at the time he was convicted of robbing a bank a good many years ago—knew of his escape from the just vengeance of the law. I did not recognize him, however, until just before he left here, as he had changed not only his appearance but his name as well. But in an unguarded moment he be-

trayed himself to me, and when I accused him of all this he did not deny it, but left Elmwood as soon as possible, and no doubt is now the tramp he was before he came here.

BESS. We will never believe this—this slanderous story of yours.

SQUIRE. Believe it or not, as you choose, but look at his conduct; think it over, and see if the evidence is not in favor of my statement. I am obliged to leave now, but will be back after a while, for even now I believe your best interests will influence you to come around to my way of thinking.

(*Goes to door c.*)

DAVID. }
MRS. B. } Never!
BESS. }

SQUIRE (*laughing*). Oh, well, we'll see—we'll see.

[*Exit, c. d.*]

DRU. Huh! Called him a robber, did he? I guess if the truth was told about Alford himself, he wouldn't dare to call anybody a robber, least of all a good man like Mr. Wentworth. It was sort of queer like though about his leavin' Elmwood so "sudden," and now I come to think of it, I wonder if that story of the tramp's which Dick read out'n the newspaper had anything to do with it. Gracious me! Don't you mind how funny he acted when Dick was a-tellin' of it first in the *Item* office that mornin'? Didn't he git faint or somethin'? I thought you said somethin' of the kind.

DAVID. That's true, Aunt Drusie, now you speak of it; I believe I do remember something about that, don't you, mother?

MRS. B. Yes, but I think he said the heat affected him.

DRU. That's so, Elizabeth, but it didn't affect none o' the rest of you, did it?

BESS. It was merely a coincidence, nothing more.

DAVID (*thoughtfully*). Of course—of course.

DRU. Yes, p'raps; but that same evenin', when the hull story come out in the paper, I happened —— (*To herself.*) Well, now, ain't that queer?

MRS. B. Isn't what queer?

DRU. Why, when Dick was readin' the paper, I happened to be a-standin' where I could see them both—Squire Alford and Mr. Wentworth, you know. I ain't never thought nothin'

about it since until this minit, but I mind now that both of 'em looked mighty queer, and sorter upset. Likely I'd never thought of it, though, if it hadn't a-been for what he said just now. Well, I got to be a-movin'. I'm goin' down to Smith's. Whittier and I'll drop in a minit on our way home if 'tain't too late. Good-bye.

MRS. B. (*seeing her to the door*). Good-bye, Aunt Drusie; look out for that lower step.

Enter TOM., R.; throws his cap on a chair.

BESS. Why, here's Tommy! (*Kisses him.*)

TOM. Gee! but it's good to see you again, Miss Bessie.

BESS. And I am glad to see you, dear; bless your heart.

MRS. B. Where have you been, Tommy?

(*TOM. sits on chair swinging his feet.*)

TOM. Down to the station to see the train come in. I saw Dick down there.

BESS. Did you?

TOM. Yep. He had a rig. Guess he was waitin' for somebody.

DAVID. What makes you think so? He didn't say anything about any one coming on this train when he was here, did he, Bess?

BESS. I think not.

TOM. Somebody did, though.

DAVID. Did you see who it was?

TOM. No, sir. They must have got in the rig when I was down lookin' at the engine, but I saw them drivin' up the street afterward—Dick and two other men; they got out and went into his office before I caught up to 'em. Dick saw me as I was goin' by, though, and hollered out to me to tell you he was comin' up to supper.

MRS. B. Well, run along now and wash your face, for it will soon be ready.

TOM. Yes, ma'am.

[*Exit, L.*]

MRS. B. What do you think of all this, David?

DAVID. Of what, mother? Oh, you mean what Aunt Drusie said, I suppose? Just her talk, I guess. I didn't notice anything that night—suppose I was thinking too much about my own trouble to notice anything else; but if she is right,—taking it all together, it looks rather strange, I must confess.

BESS. But surely you don't think there is any truth in the story?

DAVID. No, Bess, I cannot think so; at least, not in the way Alford would have us believe; but if there should be, then you may be sure he has distorted the facts in a way to injure James, whom he has always hated, just as a man of his nature hates any one who is his moral superior.

MRS. B. Your father is right, Bessie; nothing Squire Alford could say would make me believe —

(Voices heard outside; TOM. greeting some one joyfully.)

TOM. *(entering, c. d.)*. Didn't I tell you I saw —

Enter DICK, c. d., followed by JAMES.

DICK. Here he is; didn't I say —

(All surround JAMES, whom they greet warmly; TOM. runs off L.)

DAVID. Well, well, James, old fellow, welcome back, or rather welcome home,—for this is your home as long as —

JAMES *(grasping his hand)*. Thank you, David, thank you. Do you think I would have returned had I not felt sure of this kind reception, this—this —

(Turns away, unable to proceed; DICK and BESS. converse aside.)

MRS. B. It is no more than we feel, James, you may rest assured; but tell us where you have been all this time? We have not been able to understand why you went away so suddenly.

JAMES. That is a long story, my dear friends, but one which I have returned to tell you; my departure was somewhat abrupt, I admit, but my reasons for it were such that it seemed the right course for me to take at that time. I will explain it all in as few words as possible. You of course remember —

Enter WHIT. and DRU., c. d.; they exchange greetings with JAMES.

WHIT. Mr. Wentworth, we heard of your return, and so stopped in to see you. Welcome back to Elmwood.

JAMES. Thank you both. I am glad to be back, I am

sure, and now that you are here, I would like you to remain a little while, for the story I have to tell is one I wish all my friends to hear. (*Turns to the others.*) As I was saying, you remember the accident which happened the day before I left—the death of the tramp—and his strange story?

(DAVID and MRS. B. exchange glances; DRU. nods head.)

DRU. Didn't I say there was something? I said ——

DICK. Please, Aunt Drusie, let Mr. Wentworth continue. I am sure what he has to say will interest you all.

(*They group themselves around JAMES, who is in centre—the group well front. As JAMES takes up narrative again, SQUIRE appears in doorway. He pauses on seeing JAMES, and listens, unobserved.*)

JAMES. Well, my friends, I knew at the time that this story was true, for I was one of those who were alluded to—in fact, I was the one referred to as having been convicted of a crime of which he was innocent, and convicted on the testimony of a man who had previously posed as my friend,—a scoundrel, whom I had received into my home, but who, to save himself from the consequences of his own guilt, did not hesitate to sacrifice my honor and ruin my life. I have the evidence to corroborate what I tell you, and to prove that the name of the man whose perjured tongue sent me to jail, who made of me a felon and an outcast—the man who after all these years I am at last able to hold up to the scorn and execration of his fellows, was ——

Enter MARY and TOM., L.; WHIT. goes over to MARY; they listen and converse.

SQUIRE (*hastily breaking in and coming forward a little*). Have a care, you jail breaker, you—you fugitive from justice. There is law in this land, and you will find ——

JAMES (*paying no attention; goes on as before*). This man, whose guilty conscience is its own accuser, stands there before you. (*Points suddenly at SQUIRE.*)

SQUIRE. You lie—you ——

JAMES. I do not lie, Francis Alford, and you know it, for you are the man.

(*All the rest instinctively draw away from SQUIRE.*)

SQUIRE. I say that ——

JAMES (*still pointing*). You are the robber—the deceiver of my wife—the abductor of my child.

DICK (*starting*). What? Can it be that *you* ——?

JAMES. Dick, it is true; I am your father—Allen Ormsby.

(*They embrace.*)

DICK. Oh, I always felt there was something—you were —— (*Suddenly turns to SQUIRE.*) This, then, is the reason my poor mother would never tell me my real name. I thank heaven that I will now have one of which I need not be ashamed.

SQUIRE. You poor deluded fools! Do you credit these lies? (*To JAMES.*) I will make you prove the truth of this malicious attack—you will rue this day.

JAMES. I will prove it. It was for that purpose I have been working day and night for the last three months. I have already established my own innocence by the aid of evidence which the story of the tramp enabled me to procure at the scene of your crime—evidence which will also serve to place you where you belong.

SQUIRE. Again I say it is all ——

JAMES. There is no need to prolong this scene. I have accomplished my purpose. (*Motions to DICK, who goes to door, whistles and beckons. MR. PINCH enters quickly.*) Officer, this is your man; you know your duty.

MR. P. Sorry, sir, but you will have to come with me.

SQUIRE. I will not; this is an outrage—you have no warrant for this.

MR. P. Oh, I have the warrant all right. (*Shows paper.*) You had better come along without making any further fuss—or —— (*Displays handcuffs.*)

SQUIRE (*shrinking*). Just a moment. (*To JAMES.*) You think you have won, but I will soon clear myself of your foul slanders. (*Turns to DAVID.*) And at all events this will not help you, Bainbridge, with the mortgage business. I'll take care that my attorney forecloses to-morrow, and you will be turned out in the street like the dogs you all are.

DICK. Hold on. I have a few words to say on that point. I have been expecting you would give me this opportunity. (*To DAVID.*) Mr. Bainbridge, some time ago I came into possession of facts which led me to believe the man who was concerned in the mining fraud could be brought to book and made

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